

VZCZCXRO1015  
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH RUEHTRO  
DE RUEHGO #0617/01 2140716  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 010716Z AUG 08  
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7998  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1405  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4927  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8489  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6056  
RHFMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3948  
RHEHNNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1910  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000617

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/01/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM BM

SUBJECT: BURMA: REGIME WARY OF MONKS AND ACTIVISTS

REF: A. RANGOON 434  
    1B. RANGOON 454  
    1C. RANGOON 487  
    1D. RANGOON 594

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (C) Summary. Sources have confirmed reports this week that nine monks arrested on July 15 are still being held in Insein prison. The regime delayed announcing the results of monks' religious examinations until this week, but sources reported the number of passing candidates was expected to be higher than usual. Authorities held a hearing on July 30 for arrested comedian/activist Zarganar and author/activist Zaw Thet Htway in a Special Court at Insein prison, but there were no significant developments in their case. End Summary.

Arrested Monks

-----

12. (C) Embassy sources have confirmed that authorities arrested nine monks at Rangoon Central Railway Station on July 15 took them to Insein prison. Opposition lawyer U Aung Thein spoke with a detained activist in Insein prison who confirmed that the nine monks were still being held there. Authorities have not acknowledged the arrests or released the names or hometowns of the monks, but witnesses reported that the monks did not appear to be traveling together. So far no hearings have been held, and no charges have been filed. Aung Thein said that some monks speculated the arrests were the result of the regime being overly cautious during the period leading up to Martyrs' Day on July 19 and Buddhist Lent, which runs from July through October.

Exam Results, Finally

-----

13. (C) The senior monk and chairman of the Dagon Township Sangha (religious order) told our political assistant that the government delayed the release of monks' religious exam results this year. In previous years, exam results were announced before the start of Buddhist Lent; however, this year they were not published until the last week of July, a full week and a half after Buddhist Lent began on July 17. Our contact also confirmed that the number of monks passing the examinations was higher this year than in previous years. The exile press has circulated rumors that the government

sought to appease the Sangha this year by allowing more monks to pass the examinations. However, our contact declined to attach any significance to the delayed release or reportedly higher pass rates.

Updates: Zarganar, Zaw Thet Htway, and Naw Ohn Hla

-----

¶4. (C) U Aung Thein reported that officials held a hearing for detained comedian/activist Zarganar's and author/activist Zaw Thet Htway's at a special court in Insein prison on July 130. According to U Aung Thein, his clients face charges under the Video Act and the Electronics Act, which carry maximum sentences of three and ten years, respectively. Aung Thein noted, however, that these charges had not yet been finalized so more charges could be filed. We are seeking to confirm exile media reports on August 1 that Zarganar has also been charged with disturbing public tranquility. The detained activists' next hearing is scheduled for August 7. Prior to his arrest on June 4 Zarganar had been delivering relief aid to Nargis-affected areas and had repeatedly criticized the regime's recovery efforts in interviews with the press (Refs A and B). Famous author/activist Zaw Thet Htwe, who also worked closely with Zarganar and other activists to provide relief aid, was also arrested on June 13 (Ref C).

¶5. (SBU) Embassy sources have reported that Naw Ohn Hla's injuries were not life threatening. According to colleagues who visited her in the hospital, she remains in Rangoon General Hospital recovering from her July 21 car accident

RANGOON 00000617 002 OF 002

(Ref D) without complications. Naw Ohn Hla is the leader of the Tuesday Prayer Campaign, a group of pro-democracy activists who, until last Fall, visited Rangoon's Shwe Dagon Pagoda every Tuesday to pray for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners.

Comment

-----

¶6. (C) No one is exempt from Than Shwe's paranoia, especially as the anniversary of the August 1988 pro-democracy protests nears. Even unrelated monks coincidentally traveling home on the same train must be careful lest they find themselves in jail. He may succeed in preventing any demonstrations for now, but we doubt Than Shwe can buy the good will of the Sangha or citizenry with a few favorable exam results.

VILLAROSA